

Sweet Caroline

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Summary:

The loser's hang out in a diner. This can also be read on my It sideblog (on tumblr) @hanlonmike.

Sweet Caroline

It was a small diner. It was a town over from Derry in a different small Maine town. It was one that the losers loved, because they weren't losers there. They were the group of teenagers who went to the public places and were a little louder than the workers would like but not too bad because they tipped (unlike most teenagers) and were nice to the people they encountered.

The diner was a small one called 'Track's End' because it was near the end of the train tracks and mostly catered seasonal workers who worked on the train line and the occasional families that lived nearby in the apartment complexes; and not to forget the group of seven teenagers who come in about every two weeks.

The losers considered it their loser time to hang out and be losers together. Sure, they all see each other often, but sometimes the losers didn't see each other often enough. Bill and Stan had one class together, but Bill is starting his soccer season soon. He, over the summer after their freshman year, began working hard, wanting to join. the losers helped him on the sort of cool and grey days, working with him to help his foot work and with his saves (Bill had wanted to become a goalie) and with all of their hard work Bill made it on to the team, but now his days were filled with cleats and late dinners.

Stan spent his after school days with the Derry's raptor club, volunteering at the local bird sanctuary. Sometimes when Ben or Mike wanted to hang out with Stan they joined him and he introduced them all to the different hawks and owls (and the few snakes that they held, which Mike loved and Ben tried to stay far away from).

Beverly spent time with Mike the most, surprising everyone at least a little bit. Beverly liked hanging out on his family's farm in the middle of the fields. Mike learned how to draw from Beverly when she started drawing random buildings and trees on his property for art projects. Mike taught her about the animals and the food they grew and Beverly learned why Mike is vegan.

Ben and Bev also hang out, Bev going to Ben's house to help him with

erector set, building things more and more daring to see if it would even work. Bev sometimes makes things just to see if it holds for a while. Ben would paint Bev's nails and when Bev wasn't feeling good because of the bruises on her arms and stomach Ben handed over one of his many hoodie that swallowed her whole.

Eddie and Richie had almost every class together- so much so that their names were said as one word: EddieandRichie. Eddie and Richie spent most of their time together- along with the other losers, but mostly together. They didn't do many after school things- Richie sometimes stayed with Stan for the chess club and Eddie stayed behind sometimes for tutoring (he helped some students with their science while they helped with his English).

Every two weeks on Sunday the seven got together and climbed into Eddie's 1972 Vista Cruiser (even though they barely had enough seats to hold all of them) and drove off somewhere to be the losers club, at least for a little bit). This Sunday they went to the roller rink in the same town as the Track's End diner. They all rented skates and rolled around, holding hands and moving around the rink. there weren't many people there considering it was a small town on a Sunday night, so the losers had the rink and the arcade games to themselves.

It wore everyone out, Eddie made sure he had his inhaler on him and Richie made sure he had his back up inhaler. Beverly and Stan tried their best but looked like baby deer as they skated with wobbly legs and their arms stuck outwards to brace themselves as they fell. Bill, of course, was a natural even though he had only skated a handful of times in his life. Mike, who had never put on a pair of skates ever, held hands with Bill for almost the entire time he was out on the rink because *Holy shit, this is so slick!*

Richie and Eddie skated and played games back to back when Eddie's asthma was acting up or when Richie's ass hurt when he fell down one to many times from going too fast. (*If you don't slow the fuck down, then I'll make your ass hurt in a different way, Richie Tozier! – Promise?*) Richie also took his time to help Ben around the rink because Ben stuck to the wall and tried to walk with his skates rather than glide like you were meant to.

The losers lived for their Sunday night hang outs. They went to

crappy golf courses and hung out at the Derry Mall. They hung out and made dams in the B8arrens like they used to when they were in elementary school. It made them feel better, almost younger, except they didn't feel like they were kids, they felt like they were themselves, if they were ever themselves after the summer when they were thirteen, more innocent maybe? It was only like this sometimes between them. Stan felt phantom scars on his neck and face and sometimes when Eddie took a look at Bill or Richie his right arm would ache a little bit like it did when it was about to rain.

All their childhood shenanigans and all their childhood mistakes led them to themselves. these seven were meant for each other in no other way possible. In their amazing and unparalleled time together, they landed themselves in Track's End.

The diner itself was small with seven booths and maybe ten seats at the bar. The only people besides the losers who were in the diner were a younger woman and a child- a girl about the age of five, and two older, middle aged men sitting at the bar. The losers piled into the biggest booth the diner had with Bill squishing into one side, though no one complained. Elbows bumped together and accidental (and purposeful) games of footsie were started, but they were left unnoticed as the conversation was booming with laughter and good jabs at each other.

They ordered breakfast for dinner in big heaping piles, knowing that most of the plates would be shared with each other (Stan, Eddie, and Mike didn't share much- Stan and Eddie because of all the hands on their plates and their food and Mike because most breakfast food sold in a small town diner isn't vegan so he couldn't share much of the loser's food).

Bev and Richie were actively arguing over music that they would play in the juke box. Ben, Mike, Stan, and Eddie were talking about the two page book report that was due on Monday about *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury. Bill was sitting on the end, listening to both and pitching in on either conversation.

"But how can you even compare Come On Eileen to Sweet Child O' Mine?"

“Bradbury wasn’t f-fucking F. S-scott Fitzgerald. N-not every-ything is meant to suh-symbolize God.”

“How can you hate Come On Eileen?!”

“Come on, at least the metal dog was supposed to be some sort of God, right?”

“No, the dog was supposed to represent the society that they lived in with all of the judgement and stuff, right?”

“I don’t hate Come on Eileen!”

“I don’t know why she didn’t just give us Lord Of The Flies I can bullshit a paper on that book, but I have no idea where to start with this.”

“You gotta another quarter then?”

“Yeah, why?”

“I don’t want to read books at all, give me the grammar shit and let me do that for the rest of the semester.”

“Let’s play both our songs, yeah?”

“Okay.”

Just as Bev and Richie were going to push Bill and Mike off the edge of their seats to go to the jukebox across the diner, the woman, the mother, had taken her own quarter and played a song. It filled the diner completely, the music. The thump of the beats and brass music. Richie, who listens to the radio more than any average person should, groaned as the losers quieted their bickering to listen to the music.

“Are you kidding me?” Richie spoke, being careful enough so that the mother across the bar didn’t hear him as she moved to the beat with her daughter. *“Neil fuckin Diamond?”*

The losers didn’t respond, just listening to the music as they waited for their food. However, it was Ben who started it.

For every *thump* within the song, Ben's finger tapped on the table. it was barely noticeable, because Ben didn't have long fingernails like Bev did. they were tiny taps. *Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap.*

"Was in the spring, and then a spring became a summer,"

Mike was next to succumb. he didn't know the words to lots of songs played on the radio, but he could remember the tunes to most. He didn't want to admit that he knew the song because Richie might make fun of him for it. It was a slight hum; a hum you couldn't control. It slipped out of him and even Ben, who was sitting the furthest away from him, couldn't hear it. It was low and soft.

"Who'd have believed you come along?"

Stan, uncomfortable and awkward with music to begin with, began to nod his head along with Ben's finger taps. Stan couldn't hold a tune and if the beat relied on him he always seemed to mess it up, but Ben was right next to Stan tapping his fingers and Stan watched Ben's fingers and bobbed his head along. Stan could hear the faintness of the hums, but couldn't tell if it was coming from Mike or from Bill, but he grinned under biting his lips nonetheless.

"Haannddss,"

Bev was mouthing the words, knowing it from the music her mother played while they were cleaning the house when he father was gone over the summer. It reminded her of good times with her mother, and days at the quarry with the boys when Richie brought his pocket radio to practice his DJ voices. The Neil Diamond song reminded Bev of hot summer days and dancing around, so sure, Bev sang along to the words, even if Richie would give her more shit for her music taste.

"Touching haannddss,"

Bill was swaying in his seat, hitting Bev in the side every other beat. It started with his head, like Stan, but instead Bill continued it as the song was building, making it so his entire top half was swaying left to right, into Bev and looking off in the distance.

“Reaching out,”

Eddie was swaying too, like Bill, but Eddie was sat next to Richie and didn't want Richie to know that he was enjoying himself. He swayed a few times, but resituated himself so he was sitting on one of his legs in the booth. When he caught himself swaying again, he tried to make it look like he was staring at something out the window as the day was becoming night. His fake fidgets didn't fool anyone however, they all knew he was swaying along with the song like most other losers.

“Touching you,”

Richie was about to burst. Sure, he was quick to make fun and pick at the song, but when all he wanted to do was make funny voices and sing along at everyone in the booth with him. As much as he loved making fun, he couldn't expose himself as a hypocrite, especially in the sense of his own musical taste, of which he was fighting with Bev not two minutes ago. Truly, Richie was trying his hardest, biting his lips to keep himself from singing.

As the song came to its chorus all the teenagers looked at each other and their own ways of following along to the song. They were taking all their willpower to hold themselves together, but they couldn't hold themselves together, laughing they sung.

“SWEET CAROLINE!”

Richie leaned into Eddie's ear and screeched, “*BA BA BUM!*”

“Good times never felt so good! So good!”

The losers sang so loud, into each other's faces, passionately holding one another, dancing in their seats. Their earlier exhaustion from skating and reservation from singing the first verse seemed nonexistent as they sang to each other. They became loud and rambunctious, hopping in their seats and trying to be as exaggerated and as animated as they could be, giggling and cackling to each other.

Bev's curly red hair bounced as she bobbed her head. Bill was using

his body weight and swaying it into Bev's side, which then acted as a pendulum into Stan, who then knocked into Ben who replaced using his fingers with his entire hand, becoming the drummer of the group as he beat on the table and the window sill.

Stan was headbanging the mop of curls on the top of his head, enjoying himself thoroughly. Mike joined in the singing, and danced in his seat, trying to wiggle his bottom half. Richie and Eddie were nose to nose, keeping eye contact as they sang; they played with an unspoken rule that if they blinked or broke eye contact they lost.

During their song, the waitress came by with the large tray holding all their food and they calmed down only for a tiny bit. The losers continued to sing to themselves quietly as hands and arms were across the table moving and passing around plates of food and refills on their drinks until they had all of their food and began to dig in. Stan still bobbed his head, Eddie and Bill still swayed, and Mike still hummed, but their mouths were too full with their food to continue singing.

As the song faded out, all the movement stopped. They didn't do anything and ate as nothing had happened. You could hear the scraping of metal on ceramic plates and the clinking of ice against the glass of their cups. Mike glanced up from his food to side eye everyone else and he caught Bev's eyes doing the same thing. He swallowed his hash browns took a drink. Bev leaned over Stan and took a piece of Ben's sausage with her fork. Bill hummed a different song, one that he's had stuck in his head for most of the week.

The diner was quiet now. except-

"Come On Eileen is the greatest song to exist and you can't say a fucking thing that would change my mind."

"You can't believe that's true,"

The other boys listened to Bev and Richie's conversation (or rather argument) and joined in.

"Okay, I love Come On Eileen but it's not the greatest song I've ever heard,"

“B-blasphemy.”

“You can’t believe that!”

“Finally! A good man on my side! Come over here Big Bill, give me a sweet kiss!”

“Beep, beep, Richie.”

“Can it Stan the Man. You know you’re on our side!”

There in-diner concert was ignored but not forgotten as they all began to argue over what should be played on the jukebox next. They really did love their Sunday hang outs and whenever they hang out. Something linked them together- something in their souls made them right for each other.

“Don’t even fuckin try to convince me otherwise!”

“God, Rich, do you have to be so aggressive?”

“Haystack, tell me you love Come On Eileen!”

Ben threw a piece of bacon and it hit Richie’s glasses, leaving a grease smudge mark on the lenses.

“Well, thanks for the meat Benny, I’ll come by your house later and you can give me some more.”

“Beep, beep, Richie.”

Mike laughed and it started a chain reaction. The seven teenagers sitting in the diner cackled at each other and the few of Richie’s jokes that were actually funny. They ate, argued more, and enjoyed their time, as they would for as long as they hoped.